

Message Text

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ACTION SY-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 ISO-00 L-03 SSO-00 /015 W

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O R 050355Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 15

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ASEC

SUBJECT: SPECIAL SECURITY EQUIPMENT

CANBERRA FOR RSO

STATE FOR EA, SY ADD L

REF: A) CANBERRA 4987

B) WELLINGTON 2154

C) WELLINGTON 2224

1. WEEKLY TRUTH WHICH APPEARED TODAY CARRIED FOLLOWING STORY ON SPECIAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT HELD BY THE EMBASSY: QUOTE 'OUR' YANKS ARE READY - WITH TEAR GAS* ARMED AMERICAN MARINES WITH TEAR GAS GRENADES IN DOWNTOWN WELLINGTON. THY'RE THERE TO GUARD THE AMERICAN EMBASSY - DESPITE THE FACT THAT THIS RESPONSIBILITY LIES WITH THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT. EMBASSY SPOKESMEN SAY THE WEAPONS ARE TO PROTECT THEIR OFFICES IN THE IBM BUILDING ON THE TERRACE - FROM ATTACKS BY "THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS". THEY SAY TROUBLE IS MORE LIKELY FROM DISAFFECTED OUTSIDERS THAN FROM EXTREME FACTIONS WITHIN NEW ZEALAND. EMBASSY SPOKESMAN DEAN KOCH SAID UNITED STATES DIPLOMATS RELIED ON NEW ZEALAND AUTHORITIES TO ENSURE THEY COULD OPERATE WITHOUT INTERFERENCE IN THIS COUNTRY, JUST AS NEW ZEALAND'S EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON RECEIVED PROTECTION FROM HIS GOVERNMENT.

BUT THE EMBASSY HAD SOLE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING ITS INTERNAL INTEGRITY. THAT IS WHY MARINES, WHO WEAR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SIDEARMS DURING THE EVENING, HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO IT,

HE SAID. MR. KOCH SAID: "SHOULD AN EMERGENCY SITUATION ARISE WHERE NEW ZEALAND AUTHORITIES WERE NOT ABLE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE PROTECTION FOR THE EMBASSY'S PERSONNEL OR PROPERTY, THE MARINES HAVE TEAR GAS AVAILABLE FOR THIS PURPOSE. "UNFORTUNATELY, THERE HAVE BEEN INSTANCES WHERE AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC POSTS HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO UNPROVOKED ATTACKS THAT HAVE RESULTED IN THE LOSS OF LIVES AND PROPERTY. "THESE ATTACKS HAVE USUALLY BEEN PERPETRATED BY THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS. "PRECAUTIONS, THEREFORE, ARE TAKEN AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH ATTACKS TAKING PLACE ANYWHERE, ANYTIME." MR. KOCH ADDED THIS WAS STANDARD PRACTICE IN AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC POSTS. THE WEAPONS WERE ALWAYS KEPT ON THE PREMISES UNDER TIGHT SECURITY. HE SAID THE AMERICANS HAD TOLD THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT THEY WERE THERE, DESPITE THE FACT THEY WERE NOT OBLIGED TO DO SO. BUT THE RUSSIANS APPARENTLY DON'T FEEL THEY NEED SIMILAR SORTS OF PROTECTION - IN FACT THEY CLAIM THEY FEEL QUITE SAFE HERE. A SPOKESMAN FOR THE SOVIET EMBASSY, ASKED IF THEY KEPT GUNS, GAS OR GUARDS, SAID: "THAT IS A VERY STRANGE QUESTION". HE SAID THEY DID NOT, BECAUSE THEY DID NOT FEEL THE NEED TO "MAKE PREPARATIONS OF THIS NATURE". "WHY SHOULD WE BE ARMED?" HE ASKED. "WE ARE IN A FRIENDLY COUNTRY." UNQUOTE.

2. DURING INTERVIEW AMERICAN EMBASSY SPOKESMAN DID NOT STATE MARINES WEAR SIDEARMS (WHICH THEY DO NOT), AND HE NEITHER CONFIRMED NOR DENIED THAT EMBASSY POSSESSES FIREARMS.

3. IN VIEW OF HIGH CURRENT INTEREST IN SEIZURE AMCONSUL KUALA LUMPUR, POST ANTICIPATES FURTHER QUESTIONS TO BOTH EMBASSY AND NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT ON GENERAL PROVISIONS FOR SECURITY OF EMBASSIES, SPECIFIC MEASURES TAKEN BY POST, AND NEW ZEALAND LAWS ON IMPORTATION AND POSSESSION OF SPECIAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT.

4. RECOGNIZING MANNER IN WHICH THIS MATTER IS HANDLED WITH GNZ CAN HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR POSTS WORLDWIDE, EMBASSY SOUGHT DEPARTMENT'S ADVICE IN REFS B AND C, TO WHICH WE HAVE HAD NO RESPONSE.
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5. WHAT APPEARS TO BE MINOR ISSUE COULD ESCALATE INTO SERIOUS PROBLEM BETWEEN US AND NZ GOVERNMENTS. EMBASSY AGAIN URGENTLY REQUESTS DEPARTMENT'S GUIDANCE. SHOULD EMBASSY REQUEST GNZ PERMISSION TO IMPORT AND POSSESS PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (TEAR GAS, FIREARMS) OR INFORM GNZ THAT IT IS NOT AUTHORIZED TO SEEK SUCH PERMISSION (IF POSSIBLE CITING LEGAL JUSTIFICATION FOR OUR POSITION)?

IN LATTER EVENT, SHOULD EMBASSY RETAIN OR RETURN
PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT? (A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION
CONCEIVABLY COULD BE REFUSED, LEAVING EMBASSY WITH
EQUIPMENT "ILLEGALLY" IN ITS POSSESSION.)
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ellisoob
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975WELLIN02250
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750269-0942
From: WELLINGTON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750879/aaaacsid.tel
Line Count: 120
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SY
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 CANBERRA 4987
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ellisoob
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <03 JUL 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <13 NOV 2003 by ellisoob>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SPECIAL SECURITY EQUIPMENT CANBERRA FOR RSO
TAGS: ASEC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006